

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

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INSIDE: 1991 PRSA Guide To Professional Resources

BIG "GREEN" BROTHER IS WATCHING

BUSINESS RESPONDS TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Earth Day '90 Revisited: A Progress Report

PUBLIC RELATIONS JOURNAL

April 1991 Vol. 47 No. 4

FEATURES

14 **Big "Green Brother" Is Watching: New Directions In Environmental Affairs Challenge Business**

A growing number of Americans identify themselves as environmentalists. U.S. businesses are addressing concerns that include "green marketing" of environmentally friendly products and packaging, and pollution prevention. In this age of environmental activism, the quick fix is out. Companies wishing to be perceived as "clean" must carefully research, plan and promote their environmental public affairs programs.

Susan Schaefer Vandervoort, APR



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22 **Every Day Is Earth Day**

Was the 20th anniversary of Earth Day celebrated on April 22, 1990, just "eco-hype," or did it accomplish something? There's no simple answer. But what the massively publicized event did do is break down barriers between the "tree-huggers" and the mainstream.

Josh Baran



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23 **Business Changes Its Ways**

In many ways, Earth Day 1990 symbolized the beginning of a new era for business. The days of bolstering the bottom line at the expense of the environment came to an end. Millions of consumers—who now make purchasing decisions based on whether a product or company is "environmentally friendly"—made sure of that.

A. Joseph LaCovey



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24 **Public Relations, Store Tie-Ins Launch "Green" Cosmetics Line**

An extensive public relations campaign helped Estee Lauder Cos. launch "Origins," an "environmentally sensitive" cosmetics line. Local promotional tie-ins with leading department stores across the country resulted in initial sales far exceeding projections.

BRIEFINGS

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- Clients, not exams, stress students
- Life after Mapplethorpe
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30 **Making an internship work**

Jason Burger

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Cover: Jim Arndt Photography. Beth Little, a St. Paul, MN, schoolteacher and MOBIUS curriculum consultant, with the program's recycling mascot and a group of children who are studying about recycling and the environment.

Public Relations Journal is published monthly by the Public Relations Society of America, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003-2376.

Going for the "green"

How public relations professionals can help organizations effectively deal with environmental issues is the subject of this month's cover story. Full of useful terminology and references, Susan Schaefer Vandervoort's piece provides a theoretical framework along with practical tips for directing and nurturing an organization's environmental position with its many publics: consumers, advocacy groups, regulators, government officials, employees and customers.



"Green" has become good business. 3M's pollution prevention program has saved it \$500 million in cleanup costs over 16 years and continues to generate positive press and community relations. And Estee Lauder's "green" marketing success shows that ecologically safe cosmetics can be sold in the finest stores, especially when promoted along with environmental cleanup or conservation efforts.

On the eve of the 21st Earth Day, we also present two evaluations of the effects, accomplishments and environmental situations still to be resolved a year after the massive 20th anniversary celebration.

As the "greening" process continues, public relations professionals are being charged with converting complex, often adversarial relationships into cooperative efforts for mutual benefit. Proactive environmental programs by business and industry must be carefully positioned and marketed to appeal to and succeed with many different constituencies. It should no longer be difficult for a public relations counselor to get management's attention and budget for green projects. Fear of environmental disasters has created a booming market for crisis and risk management counselors, strategies and communications. In many cases, pollution control and reduction, waste management and recycling are necessary courses of action for an organization's very survival.

The trick for the public relations professional will be to balance the conflicting demands of the many publics involved when a green issue sprouts up. With the advent of environmental terrorism, there has probably never been a more critical time to clean up our global act. As Kermit the Frog would say, "It isn't easy being green." But the effort is worth it. And public relations practitioners are in a unique position to color this brave new world.

Susan L. Fry, Editor

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33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003-2376
(212) 995-2230

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Plowing new ground in environmental affairs



E. Bruce Harrison, APR

Business and industry executives rightly see the environment as one of their biggest and most problematic issues. U.S. company managers are looking for ways not only to respond to tough green-versus-growth issues—tougher here than in any other country—but to take charge, go beyond environmental compliance and manage for competitive advantage.

"Greenism" is forcing public relations to plow new ground. As counselors, we are asked to address a myriad of environmental issues and problems. Risk and crisis management are critical skills. "Green" issues range from waste disposal to chemical emissions, water pollution to recycling and global warming to conservation.

A recent survey identified six major pieces of legislation and a dozen other environmental concerns to at least 20% of the companies in the sample. No less than 95% of respondents considered implementation of the Clean Air Act most important. Pollution prevention concerned 79%, with 68% citing Superfund and the Clean Water Act as "important." (See box.)

Negative images of industrial accidents and environmental disasters coupled with the media's bias toward green advocacy are shaping public perceptions. This situation makes straightforward communication among media, industrial and public interests, even about matters unrelated to the environment, extraordinarily difficult today.

Information that used to be proprietary to corporate management is now public. For instance, the Superfund law requires publication of raw data about plant and process air emissions. Employees, communities, activist groups, security analysts and others get the numbers in print media or on the nightly TV news, as do corporate executives. This situation makes open exchanges between business and publics on green issues hazardous at best. As a result of an incredible abundance of information directly received or distilled by others, management must deal with confusion,

misperceptions and preformed attitudes.

Faced with these conditions, organizations can easily falter in a crisis. Take, for example, the Exxon Valdez incident in March 1989. Clear lessons emerged: The CEO makes or breaks the public relations outcome. Like a relief pitcher, the CEO is only as good as his last "save." A company can do the right thing technically and still lose the public relations game.

The human factor is particularly powerful in environmental affairs, often outweighing science, logic or even facts.

Issues have broad impact

Because of these factors, green public relations issues are exerting their influence. Here are a few examples:

- **Banking**—When evaluating loan requests from businesses, bankers must now consider whether a business will develop or inherit environmental problems that could leave the bank saddled with heavy liabilities.

- **Health Care**—The disposal of medical and radiological waste is becoming a major dilemma for many hospitals and clinics, as incinerators are banned. Public consciousness of pollution, and the possibility of related disorders, is on the rise.

- **Engineering**—The subspecialty of environmental engineering has exploded with opportunity. Companies and government agencies find they must hire technical experts to guide them through the maze of environmental laws and regulations.

- **Law**—Environmental law practices are also a major growth area, both in the government and the private sector.

- **Science**—Certain issues expose the flaws in the popular image of science as an objective, fact-driven march along the high road toward truth. Nutrition is one; the environment is another. Acid rain and global warming are examples of environmental issues that reveal strong partisanship in the face of ambiguous scientific evidence.

Environmental sciences have grown

Managers Rank Environmental Issues

Issues are ranked in order of importance by a selected sample of key environmental managers of 18 companies and one labor union. Roughly one-third of respondents were from petroleum companies; the others were spread evenly among manufacturing, electronics, food, transportation, utility and chemical plants.

Percent Ranking "Important"

Issue(s)

95%	Clean Air Act Implementation
79%	Pollution Prevention
74%	Resource Conservation & Recovery Act Reauthorization
68%	Superfund, Clean Water Act
58%	Environment Taxes, Alternative Fuels
53%	Groundwater, Wetlands
47%	Global Environment, Toxic Substances
37%	Oil Spill Liability, Solid Waste
26%	Energy Security, Acid Rain
21%	Drinking Water, Ozone Depletion, Offshore Mining/Minerals

The following issues were listed as important to less than 16% of respondents: wilderness areas, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, asbestos, endangered species, EPA construction grants, forestry issues, pesticides, soil conservation and water resources.

Source: National Environmental Development Association

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prominent within the world of science in general. It is speculated that ecology could displace physics as the pre-eminent scientific discipline within a decade or two.

Public interest turning "green"

The roots of this endemic institutional preoccupation with the environment lie in the public's interest in it. Workers, consumers, school children and other groups all rate the environment among their most serious concerns. It has become a polling cliché that three-fourths of Americans consider themselves "environmentalists" (even if a considerably smaller percentage are notably active). And most have decided that they don't trust business to advance their interests in this regard.

The pivotal media role in this process cannot be ignored. Vivid coverage of environmental disasters and tragedies has created a gallery of memorable images in the public mind: Love Canal, Santa Barbara, Bhopal, Prince William Sound, Kuwait.

Moreover, the media are seen by some as having become actors in these dramas, not merely reporters of them. As *Wall Street Journal* reporter Amal Kumar Naj has written, "...In a remarkable transition, the baton of environmentalism has passed from fence-climbing radicals and fringe groups into the hands of a powerful and credible

constituency, the media....A number of journalists feel, and rightly so, that if they don't rigorously influence public policy and force the issue on the business community, nothing will be achieved."

How can practitioners help?

At the least, the risk communicator can help management understand why certain publics are worried about certain products or practices. But the practitioner's role goes

"Ecology could displace physics as the pre-eminent scientific discipline within a decade or two"

beyond merely conveying information to building public relationships. This implies discourse and interaction, keeping a finger on the public pulse and interpreting that pulse to management.

To be effective, a business executive has to see green and growth as a rapidly widening interface. Public relations activities must harmonize environmental concerns with management's need to create and serve customers.

Public relations professionals must advise

corporate clients how to adapt in response to shifting public sentiment on environmental issues. Corporate change must be managed and appropriately communicated both internally and externally.

Counselors must be prepared to solve problems as part of a team that includes other key professionals, including lawyers, engineers and financial officers. To meet this challenge, we will have to apply more market research, explore and understand the psychology of litigation, and become more aggressive about risk interpretation. We must realize that our companies and our clients will be communicating with the media and important publics who have virtually the same information we have.

Counselors need to give business management accurate and anticipatory advisories of public fears and desires on environmental matters. They must also provide concrete ways to change public perceptions of business conduct when green issues arise. In this way, our services will be in great demand as green becomes routine.

E. Bruce Harrison, APR, is chairman, E. Bruce Harrison Co., Inc., Washington, DC. Eighty percent of the firm's public relations counseling involves environmental issues for business and government.